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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

28 November 1958

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: The Berlin Problem in the Wake of the Soviet Note

1. The attached memorandum was prepared by the staff as a draft of the Board paper promised you today on the Berlin situation. With the delivery of the Soviet note on the subject, the memorandum is somewhat outdated. Nevertheless, the Board feels that enough of it remains valid and relevant to justify your scanning it.

2. The more important new elements in the situation as a result of the Soviet note can be summarized as follows:

a. A Soviet action to hand over to the GDR responsibilities for Western access to Berlin, the point of departure in the draft memorandum, does not now seem to be immediate. A pledge is given that for a period of six months there will be "no changes in the present procedure for military traffic" between Berlin and West Germany. It is possible that, if the West rejects outright the negotiations proposed for revising the status of Berlin, the Soviets would hand over to the East Germans at an earlier date. This

28 NOV 1958

DOCUMENT NO. 30
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CLASS. CHANGED TO: TS S C
NEXT REVIEW DATE: _____
AUTH: HR 70-2

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would bring into play all the contingencies discussed in our draft memo. More likely, however, the Soviets have been impressed by the ~~storm~~ which has blown up over Berlin in the West, are uncertain of Western responses to any precipitate move on their part, and will desist from handing over to the East Germans for the promised six-month period.

b. While the immediate crisis is thus postponed, the effect of the Soviet note is to make the prospect of an eventual crisis far more definite. The note explicitly commits the Soviets to hand over to the East Germans if there is no successful negotiation for a revision of Berlin's status. When the Soviets hand over to the GDR, the latter is to have the rights of a fully sovereign state over land, water, and air communications. This means that the Soviets would abdicate all responsibility, and that Western access would be at the mercy of the GDR. In this situation, the Western Powers are warned that resort to force by them would be regarded by all members of the Warsaw Treaty "as an act of aggression against them all and will immediately cause appropriate retaliation."

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c. You will note that the staff draft (Para. 9) regarded it as likely that the Soviets would retreat before a Western show of force. With the explicit threat contained in the note, we now consider that the likelihood of Soviet resistance is increased should the situation assumed in the draft memorandum present itself again. Of course, the negotiations which will presumably now take place could over a period of several months considerably alter positions on both sides.

d. The prospects for successful negotiations are at this stage not bright, however. The plan which the Soviets put forward for making West Berlin a "free city" amounts to ending Western authority there, already makes the "free city's" right to contact with the outside world dependent on its not harboring "subversive" activities, and anticipates its economic absorption into the GDR. The position which the West will presumably take will be that Berlin is inseparable from the German question as a whole. This would mean a negotiation of a kind which, as you will note from Para. 3 of the draft memorandum, we have not thought the Soviets desired at this time. The fact that they have maneuvered themselves into a position where high-level negotiations

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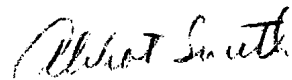
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on the German question are almost unavoidable might mean either (1) that Khrushchev's speech on November 10 raising the Berlin question was ill-considered, or (2) that the Soviets regard the threat to the GDR posed by the continuing Western presence in Berlin as more intolerable than we supposed they did.

e. Alternatively, the USSR may have changed its repeatedly reaffirmed position that new four-power negotiations on Germany should not be held at this time. The note gives no encouragement to any suggestion that there may be movement in the basic Soviet attitude on the German question as a whole. If a negotiation takes place, the Soviets will almost certainly stand on their position that there should be a peace treaty with a confederation of the two German states. Their aim in the negotiation would be to test once again the firmness of the West on its German policy, and in particular to exploit divisions between West Germany and the allies which might develop in the new situation.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES



Abbot E. Smith
Acting Chairman

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

26 November 1958

DRAFT MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: The Berlin Situation

Soviet Motives in Provoking a Crisis Over Berlin

1. Soviet willingness to precipitate a crisis over Berlin at this time is another manifestation of the hardening tendency which has marked Soviet foreign policy as a whole over the last year. The USSR appears to be probing for weak points in Western positions thus reflecting the conviction, frequently expressed in recent Communist pronouncements, that the balance of power between the two camps has shifted. We do not believe that the Soviet move indicates any greater Soviet willingness to risk general war; it may, however, signify a Soviet belief that the West is now less disposed to run substantial risks of war and that therefore the West is more likely to give in to such pressures.

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2. In instigating a new crisis over Berlin, the Soviets probably have in mind four specific and related objectives:

(1) paramount among these is the long-standing Soviet desire to move the West toward acceptance of the USSR's version of the status quo in Eastern Europe, particularly vis a vis Germany. The Soviet leaders clearly hope to be able to legalize the existence of the "sovereign" German Democratic Republic, to increase the internal stability of the GDR regime, and, in general, to gain international recognition of the "two Germanies" concept (which would also have the effect of gaining recognition for the Oder-Neisse line). (2) A concomitant Soviet objective is, of course, to press for eventual Allied abandonment of Berlin itself. The Soviets view the Western outpost in Berlin as a major sore spot, both in terms of its very real and very harmful effects on the GDR and its damaging effects on the general position and prestige of the USSR. (3) The USSR would like to use the Berlin crisis to reduce Bonn's confidence in its allies, disrupt its relations with NATO, and encourage a willingness to deal independently with the East. (4) Related closely to this is the Soviet hope that it thus can impede West German rearmament and further strengthening of NATO forces in West Germany.

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3. We do not believe that the Soviets have intended that a crisis over Berlin should bring about a new high-level meeting on the German problem. They must realize that in such a formal confrontation the West would be no more ready than it has been in the past to accept the Soviet "solution," that is, a permanently divided Germany. On the other hand, if the West should propose a meeting in which the two Germanies could also participate, this would be a step toward the acknowledgement of the GDR's status which the Soviets seek, and they would probably accept it. Such a meeting would also provide a forum for pushing other Soviet proposals which are currently to the fore -- mutual troop withdrawals, a Central European inspection zone, and the new Rapacki plan for renouncing nuclear weapons in the zone.

Soviet Plans for the Crisis

4. The USSR almost certainly intends to transfer to the East German regime its responsibilities concerning Allied rail, road, air, and canal access to Berlin; we believe that it is likely to do so at any time. By maintaining a pose of both reasonableness and determination in this matter, the Soviets hope to persuade the Allies -- and the world at large -- that countermeasures would be, at one and the same time, risky and unnecessary.

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They hope, in other words, to convince the Allies that the alternative to a "small" concession will be a sharply deteriorating situation in Germany carrying with it the risk of war.

5. The Soviets hope for tacit Allied acceptance of GDR control over access to Berlin. Such a Western response would then be interpreted as a sign of weakness and would almost certainly be followed by a series of minor GDR harassments designed to force direct Allied-GDR contacts. Such contacts would be taken to demonstrate de facto Allied recognition of the GDR. The Soviets and East Germans would insist that the Allies had thereby surrendered any and all previous rights to the "occupation" of West Berlin. Allied access to the city would then be further harassed, gradually reduced, and perhaps eventually severed by the East Germans.

6. During roughly the same period, West German access to the city, already under GDR control for several years, would probably be subject to some impairment and would be made prohibitively expensive. The East Germans would offer to maintain the "neutrality" of West Berlin (i.e. a promise not to incorporate it outright into the GDR). They would also offer to supply it with foodstuffs and

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the materials necessary to sustain industry. These offers would be calculated to ease alarm in West Berlin and West Germany, but would be intended to result finally in the economic and political absorption of the city by East Germany. The Soviets probably hope that, during such a process, Allied unity would be whittled away and that a lack of Allied and West German resolve would gradually lead to acceptance of the new situation.

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~~SECRET~~Soviet Response to Various Western Courses of Action

7. It is almost certain that, to the extent that the USSR has in fact worked out a schedule for exploiting the Berlin crisis, such a plan would be subject (at a minimum) to delay and (at a maximum) to abandonment, depending on the vigor and unity of Allied and West German response. We believe, for example, that there is an even chance that the initial Soviet step -- transfer of access responsibilities to the GDR -- would be altered, postponed, or cancelled if the three Western Powers threatened extreme action in advance of the event. Chances for a Soviet retreat under these circumstances would of course be enhanced if the Western Powers offered Moscow some opportunity for saving face.

8. In the event that the transfer is actually implemented and the Allies refuse to deal with GDR personnel at control points, it is probable that Allied land access to the city would be refused. In these circumstances, the institution of an Allied airlift to supply the Berlin garrison could be severely harassed by Soviet and/or East German electronic countermeasures. We do not believe, however, that such measures would be used immediately, at least not until the Soviets had arrived at a new estimate concerning both the probable consequences of the land blockade and Allied determination to sustain such an airlift.

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9. If the Allies force their way through GDR highway control points, we believe that Moscow would almost certainly try to avoid direct conflict between Allied and Soviet or GDR forces. It is conceivable that East German forces would attempt to prevent Allied movement through "indirect" means, such as the destruction of bridges and the erection of physical obstacles. But, because the Soviets would probably estimate that such measures would, in fact, lead to direct conflict, we doubt that they would be considered a practicable recourse. On the contrary, it is much more likely that an Allied show of force in this manner would result in a Soviet retreat. GDR personnel might retain ostensible authority over Allied movement but would, in practice, not attempt to exercise it. Soviet propaganda would immediately brand the Allied act as "aggression" creating an imminent danger of war; simultaneously they would demand negotiations.

10. Other countermeasures -- such as suspension of West German trade with East Germany or the severance of West German diplomatic relations with the USSR -- might lead to a more conciliatory Soviet posture and would probably at least delay additional moves against West Berlin. We do not believe, however, that diplomatic or economic retaliation would be sufficient to force a return to Soviet control of the checkpoints, once transfer to East Germans had been formally undertaken.

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11. The West could accept GDR border controls, but at the same time solemnly warn the USSR that it regards the East Germans only as "agents," does not consider Soviet responsibility terminated, and will not tolerate any new restrictions on its rights of access to Berlin. If this position included the threat of forceful action against GDR harassment, the Soviets might postpone steps intended to force the West out of Berlin, but we believe that probing actions to test Western determination would nevertheless be undertaken before very long.

12. An Allied decision to react only verbally to the initial Soviet moves would not in strict logic affect later Allied opportunities to draw the line forcefully. But it is our belief that the more the Allied position on the status of Berlin is eroded, the more difficult it will become for the Allies to find a solution which would avoid further concession or, alternatively to avoid risk of military conflict. There are, we believe, several reasons for this: The more the Allies appear to the world to accept in practice GDR "sovereignty," the more "unreasonable" the Allies would seem to be in the event of a later decision to take more forceful action. Further, to the extent that the Soviets believed that their piecemeal drive against the Western position was successful, the more they would be inclined to disbelieve any Allied threats and

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the more they would be committed -- both in terms of policy and "face" -- to a specific line of action.

13. An important factor affecting the ability of the West to take a strong stand at some later stage would be the unfavorable reactions in West Berlin and West Germany to any concessions. The loss of confidence by the Berlin population and fear in Bonn that US policy on Germany was undergoing revision would create an atmosphere of confusion in which it would be increasingly difficult to uphold a clear line of resistance to Soviet encroachment on Berlin. On the other hand, we believe that an initial strong stand on the West's present rights in Berlin would be widely supported in Berlin, West Germany, and Western Europe generally.

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